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OF LITERATURE

Poetry Number

Edited by

William Rose Benét

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SPECIAL POETRY NUMBER

The Saturday Review of Literature

Poetry Today in America

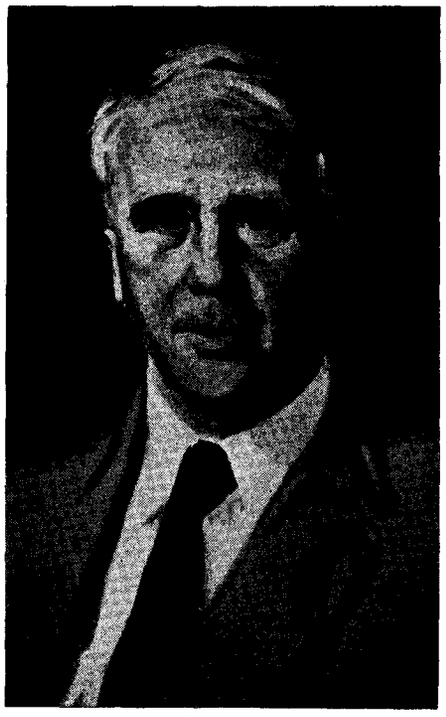
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IN talking or writing about poetry, the first difficulty that strikes one is the general lack of agreement as to what constitutes poetry. Confusion exists to no such extent in the discussion of prose. The average reader is apathetic toward the development of the art of verse, toward expression in a form that has become, to him, increasingly formless, inchoate, obscure, and highly specialized. It is hyper-esthetic and way over his head. Whereas he knows where he is with a story in prose or a prose article.

This difficulty has always existed and, to tell the truth, the poets themselves have sometimes done very little to make it easier for the reader. Why should they? Most people passed poetry by, a book of poems did not net enough royalty to buy the poet more than a few neckties, people regarded such a writer as a freak of dubious intentions, particularly in America where physical prowess, social conformity, and business acumen were the proper attainments of Man, and a liking for poetry was "sissy," arty, and rather embarrassing. We are becoming more adult now—but even the intellectuals and the earnest young men cast a rather suspicious side-glance at poetry. What has it ever accomplished? What use is it in the class struggle? What does it contribute to society? To tell you the truth, most people avoid poetry because they think it is an opiate, something deleteriously habit-forming, and a sentimental weakness. I'm sure they think that. I've seen it in their eyes.

Poetry *can* be all those things, that is—what people *call* poetry. But in that case it is sure to be the bogus article. Of course most of the "homey," "folksy," blatantly obvious and moralistic verse the average person welcomes to his breast is also inevitably bogus. But people go on thinking of that as poetry, just as they go on getting dewy-eyed over bad painting because the subject matter appeals to their emotions. They are, in this dynamic land, just beginning to accept poetry as a craft, and an art.

They were just as far along as they are now before the late Great War, when, about 1912, poetry began to erupt all over these United States, but chiefly in New England and around Chicago. Our great modern New England poet, Robert Frost, had to go to England to get his first books published, and a St. Louis editor, William Marion Reedy, took a chance on the tentative beginnings of Edgar Lee Masters's "Spoon River Anthology" written under the pen name of Webster Ford; and Vachel Lindsay traded his first rhymes for bread, and Carl Sandburg held every sort of job from soldier to dish-washer while beginning to write; just as the late Edwin Arlington Robinson had warmed a chair in the New York Custom House, thanks to the literary acumen of "Teddy" Roosevelt. But poetry suddenly came to the fore just the same. Amy Lowell started her *Blitzkrieg* for Imagism and Free Verse. She was considerably more than a Nine Days Wonder. Poetry magazines began to blossom all over the land and "die to make verse free." And then the war intervened and blew all art higher than a kite. And another quarter century, merely, has proved that war is what a certain proportion of the human race seems to prefer. So, in a way, we haven't got on very fast with poetry! The practical hardheaded business men and the fine upright statesmen of clear vision have, as usual, been running human society—right into the ground. The poets have merely been the idle dreamers who weren't prepared. The others, of course, were wide awake and fully prepared. Don't make me laugh, bitterly!



From the painting by Keith Martin

Robert Frost

We called that period, just before the late Great War, the Renaissance in American poetry. After the war it took the poets a long time to reassemble their ranks and get back into any sort of touch with the public. More than ever they turned in upon themselves and wrote for themselves or their own little group. The world was licking its wounds and this country in particular was worshipping something called "normalcy." That funny, illiterate word expressed its apparent desire.

Today it would seem from indications that war, whether or not America is immediately involved, is going to put a damper on most of the poetry being written, yet it is possible that certain of our poets may still be heard through the tumult. Art cannot live in a military state. Athens cannot be Sparta, and vice versa. But we may begin to realize for the first time that the truly American poets are the people best conserving the great things we mean when we speak of our democracy; the things for which we will fight against the world domination of ruthless dictatorship.

I do not mean that the modern poet

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can write battle songs or make the eagle scream with any conviction; or would wish to, if he could. We have seen the face of modern war and it is horrible. We know that from the last time. I mean simply that, in good poetry as in good prose, words are really no good till they get up out of the books and begin to walk around. And words like Liberty or Democracy are no good till the poets can tell you what they mean and set them into action before you. And they can do that, because those are words all poets have always lived by. They have never lived by intolerance or *Anschluss* or "the right to brutality" or geopolitics or Might is Right or the imperialistic pursuit of power. They have always hated such things with their whole soul and their whole strength.

If it seems to you that I have been talking as though Chaucer and Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton—not to mention more from the great roster—had never existed, I assure you that the average American citizen, or citizen of Europe for that matter, gives them little thought. Walt Whitman told us great truths about the human race and about America, and we pay him a great deal of lip-service because he is a national figure now. But we do not quote him in Congress or consider him in public affairs. The Führer of the Nazis cares nothing for the great literature of Germany, where the lyric poet Heine is banned and the poet and sage of Weimar hardly even a dim memory. The political reactionaries of France and England could with benefit have resorted to their Voltaire and their Shakespeare, but they did not. Neither does any nation trust its God. The ideologies of the age are entirely materialistic, and by their fruits ye shall know them.

It is of little importance, comparatively speaking, that in America today there are thousands of amateurs writing verse and many of them getting it published in little magazines. The urge that drives most of them to write may be a reflection upon our social and economic system or it may be human vanity or it may be catharsis or it may, rarely, be a real desire to learn the mechanics of a definite form of expression in literature. It does not seem to me that the attitude of the public toward poetry or toward what it thinks is poetry has changed very greatly in the United States since the last war. But certain things have happened to the poets, and perhaps I may be permitted to state what I think present indications are.

The poetry most praised by the intellectuals of the century is largely obscure and difficult, too elliptical in its expression to be easily understood by the average reader, written often as though the poet were a member of an esoteric cult who desired to appeal only to the other members. This charge can be substantiated by examining the works of several of our younger modern poets. The work of the greatly praised Hart Crane, who had in him the makings of a remarkable poet, but who lacked literary discipline and the power of organization, is a case directly in point. Poetry became a game for the intellect and belonged upon the puzzle page. From time immemorial its virtues have been condensed expression and the elimination of unnecessary elaboration and obvious commentary. But now the poets eliminated so much that it became impossible to follow their allusions to private experiences. They wrote cabalistically. They hinted in a superior fashion and made ambiguous gestures. The average reader gave them up as a bad job.

To the present writer that sort of writing *is* a bad job. Of course poetry cannot be approached as prose. The child said "Poetry is a thing you make prose of," and reflected thereby most faulty instruction. The present Librarian of Congress has told us, as we have been told before, that "A poem should not mean, but be"; and, as to lessoning the breathless world, an American philosopher has informed us that "To say that poetry is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle immoral." Again, "the technique of poetry cannot be separated from its inner nature." All this is true. But it does not affect the proposition that the best poetry can be understood, even though sometimes it may demand a little more brainwork on the part of the average reader than he is lazily accustomed to give to the printed word. "A metaphor," again said the child, "is a suppressed smile" (confusing the word *simile*), and "a metaphor is a thing you shout through" (confusing *megaphone*), and Shakespeare would have found both definitions true in the larger sense. Poetry is a metaphorical language. It gives you impressions, not scientific statement. The late Edwin Arlington Robinson said "Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said. All poetry, great or small, does this. And it seems to me that poetry has two characteristics. One is that it is, after all, undefinable. The other is that it is eventually unmistakable."

So when you undertake to read a poem you are up against something

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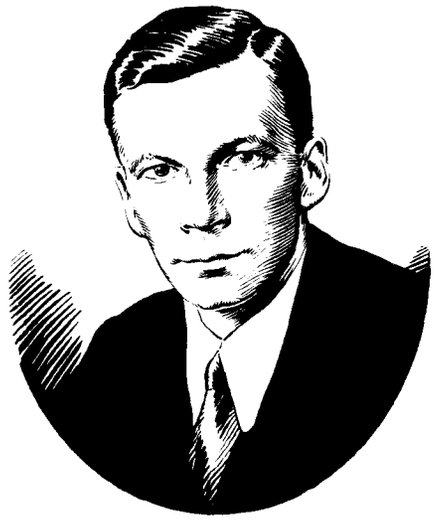
Poetry and Subject Matter

MARK VAN DOREN

SAVE for the esoteric and the insane, no one who in recent years has defended a modern art by insisting that all art be free from subject matter has ever been quite comfortable in doing so. For art needs subject matter as much as it needs form, and only a madman will continue to deny this. Indeed it cannot have form without subject matter; though it can have technique, a smaller thing that survives catastrophes easily, a kit of tools that turns up, rusty but still recognizable, under the ruins of any civilization. It is the tools of poetry rather than its shape and meaning with which criticism has largely been concerned since poetry in its modern phase began to need defending—since, that is to say, it began to lose its audience. As soon as readers missed the big thing they were told that if they looked sharp enough and listened intently enough they would find a lot of little things capable of taking its place. They have looked and listened, or some of them have, and the miracle has not happened. It could not happen, for in art it is not true that the successful whole is the sum of its definable parts. There is something beyond the parts, a formed life which in poetry at any rate is never born without benefit of subject matter. The difficulty of modern poetry is to be explained not by the presence in it of techniques which further study will make us love but by the absence in it of subject matters. Far into it as we go, we shall not find them. They are not there.

This is not an error, it is a tragedy, and the whole of our time has been called upon to enact it. Nor by our time is meant the last few decades merely; nor has the trouble been located in any one country of our world. It is almost a hundred and fifty years since Wordsworth, who in many respects is still the classic of modernity (though in schools and colleges he is taught as one who represents a certain good old order), first became aware that the masterpiece for which he had groomed himself must languish for lack of a subject. His ambition at thirty was not unlike Milton's—to live in the composition of a long poem which could never be let die. But what should it be about? Gods and men? There were no gods. Some old war of Greece or England? Wars had lost their savor now that Napoleon was turning combat into murder. Love? Honor? Virtue? Salvation? Beauty? Truth? The words were undergoing redefinition; psychology, which had replaced philosophy, was tracking down their associations rather than reinforcing their powers; he was not sure of their meanings, let alone their glories. Where then should he turn? He turned to himself, saying: I shall explore my own capacities, I shall ransack my mental past for signs that I am indeed a poet, so that when the subject arrives I shall have the confidence to attack it. He wrote "The Prelude" but the subject never arrived. Wordsworth's long poem does not exist. A fine poem, with himself for its subject matter, does exist; but the finer poem he had conceived remained as remote from him as it has remained from all of his successors in the art. They too have been forced back upon themselves in the search for something to say. In England, in France, in Germany, in America this has been progressively the case, until even the subject of self has become doubtful and confused. Such shreds of personality and belief as the poet retains he more or less bravely exploits. What we overhear, however, is the exploitation rather than the bravery, and we are not too certain as to what it is that the poet is telling us about himself. Yet one tone predominates. It is the tone of complaint, which in distinguished poems becomes the tone of irony. And the complaint, or the irony, has to do with a universal death of subject matter.



Mark Van Doren

For subject matter is here after all, but in the gruesome guise of statements that it is no longer available to the poet. His poems are demonstrations that poetry has become impossible because the world no longer supplies him with things to love. "The Waste Land" said this in several brilliant ways, among them being the way of quotation: Mr. Eliot by appropriating luminous lines from old poems reminded us of how much light had gone out of the scene he made no attempt to glorify. Yet "The Waste Land" was and is but one of many modern instances. By and large contemporary poetry says that there is nothing to say. From time to time an antique drum is dragged out of the attic and thumped, but the effect is almost invariably hollow. America, the millennium, love, labor, the land — these themes have their brief day and their inevitable night. For faith in any theme still fails to be general enough for the purposes of great poetry. We still listen to the man who offers us the subject matters inverted. We might like them better if they were right side up. But we prefer the honesty of him who keeps them where they have been for so long and weary a time: head down, and dizzy with disorder.

The inversions have their fascination, and modern poetry is much to be admired for the ingenuity—by no means cold or heartless at the best—with which the operation has been performed. But we should admit that it is an operation, and that the themes come out with altered faces. Take, for instance, wine. The theme is as old as poetry, and once was as free as air to float and smile. Many a Chinese poet made his entire reputation with it, endlessly varying the song of the sorrows it could sweeten. Its new name is drunkenness, and itself is a sorrow; or rather it is a nightmare bred out of other nightmares, and riding to escape those causes. Take war. "To war

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and arms I fly . . . the first foe in the field . . . a sword, a shield embrace"—the felicity of such phrases has become unthinkable. For no one any longer knows what war means if it does not mean unspeakable, mixed horror. The profession of soldier is gone along with the feeling that battles have outlines. The poetry of war has ceased to be capable of variation; it is sodden with simplicity of the sort that inspires moans and manifestoes but not the clear grace of something old said in a new way. Or take love, which might have been expected to flourish inexhaustibly in poetic soil. It still grows there, but the roots are what we see; the flowers are underground, their manifold shapes and colors reduced to a single darkness while their one source, the primitive taproot of desire, waves dryly and monotonously in the hot sun of research. When poets did not know what love was they celebrated their loves in the thousand different ways which they seemed to deserve. They still do not know what love is; but they think they should, are miserable because they don't, and so cannot see what chance has put there for them to see—a particular woman, a particular man, who is waiting to be loved. The subject has been tarnished beyond any tolerable point; and once more it has ceased to reveal its variety. Poets have ideas about love instead of lovers; and since ideas in any generation tend to be like one another, so our poetry of love is uniformly disillusioned and abstract. Take virtue, glory, justice, God. Merely to name these things is to announce their absence. Virtue is vanity, glory is departed, justice is a joke, and God has not walked in the garden for centuries.

TO account for all of this would be to write the history of the world. Nor would it be easy to draw a moral from the tale, or to prescribe its ending. Once again, it is the best poets, not the worst, of whom the tale is told. It is their tragedy, and the solution is not immediately visible. If it is something like religion that they need, religion does not come back overnight, nor is it to be had by taking two or three thoughts. Yet one question can be asked. What is it that has changed? Is it the world, or is it the poets? And if it is the poets, what can be said in explanation or defense of their present way of looking about them and rendering what they see?

It is a commonplace of criticism that the world a modern artist sees—a painter, a musician, a poet—is hopelessly unattractive. The industrial revolution, machinery, the middle class, too much sanitation, too little leisure, the credit system, standardization, total wars, frontier psychology, cities and the suburbs of cities are variously

Drawing by William Rothenstein

T. S. Eliot

blamed for the hideousness about him; and he is pitied because of the dilemma thus presented—either he must shrink into semi-blindness and work in a mist of pretense or he must face the spectacle and give it back in terms of its own bitterness. The nineteenth century saw him settled in his dilemma, and the poets of that century divided themselves into two classes: those who escaped into fancy and those who stuck with imagination even when the imagination must grow sick with what it saw. This is the standard view, and it leaves only one question unanswered. Was the world ever beautiful or good to eyes which could see nothing else? Is any actual world the prime material of poetry?

To say that the things of this world were never the things of poetry is not to say that poetry is moonshine. It is sunshine, and it falls upon an abundance of imperfection. Indeed as it falls it does not expect to find perfection, for it brings its own power and keeps warm in spite of what it sees. It cannot be disillusioned by a world of shadows, since it helps to make those shadows; its brightness springs from its absolute lack of illusion, and its habit of accepting what it finds. Moonshine suggests, in fact, the course of modern poetry from the time when Shelley thought he saw perfection coming to the time when hundreds of his unhappy heirs thought they were the first in human history to find perfection missing. It was never here, and it will never be here, and the poet should know this better than anybody. But the typical modern poet, having sold himself to the world, knows only that he has been deceived. Nor is the fault at that point his special fault. He shares with everybody a myopia of the inner eye, the eye which detects possibilities in shadows and remembers the whole fair rondure of night and day. We stand too close to the little world to see the great one of which it is so inadequately and yet so uniquely the image. We lack ideas, we lack memory, we lack wisdom. So we lack humor and love; and so our poetry suffers from an absence of subject matter.

A good and true subject in itself cannot make a poem. There is genius and there is form. But genius cannot do without matter, and form is a myth unless there is something to say. What is said will be said by the form too, and indeed we shall not know what it is unless its shape speaks to us equally with its essence. But once again, form is more than a collection of conscious tricks; and certainly it is more than technical novelties. It is the way the artist sees his subject when he is bent upon making others see it with him; it is the way his private vision becomes public, passes from him alone to man everywhere. He uses all the tricks he knows, but if he is a loving artist he uses what he does not recognize as tricks, and in fact may not recognize in himself at all. This is his sense of what he or anyone else would have to do in order to carry conviction. But in the first place he has his conviction. The world is all that it is, and there is an infinite number of things to say about it.

Here Is the World

Res tantum cognoscitur, quantum diligitur—ST. AUGUSTINE

By Raymond Holden

ALL the earth's ores, unmixed with air and fire,
Could never make the metal men require.
Not save with love's warmth and with pity's breath
Could thought be forged to kill the thought of death.
Here is the world, all its variety
Reached by my arm and charted by my eye,
Source of my substance and my spirit's seat.
Yet without love its wealth were my defeat,
And, but for pity, it would murder me.
I love, it pities, and we both are free.

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Adulation and the Artist

C. P. LEE

THREE things an artist must have: discontent, which drives him forward, an ideal towards which he may shape his efforts, and quietness in which to think what that ideal is and how best to reach it. If any one of these three be denied him, his artistic growth is stunted. But since 1910 we in America have constantly denied the artist quiet. Since 1910 the pursuit of culture has become as rabid and as well organized as red-baiting hunts; America takes seriously every claim of every artist, no matter how piddling or preposterous, and taking his claim seriously, she robs the young posturer of his chance for true greatness. For although the artist should and must feel that he is an interpreter and a spokesman for the inarticulate, he must be made to prove that his claim is valid by constant widening and shifting of thought, and by improved handling of form. Had Whitman not been thought a crank when he wrote "I Sing America," he would never have written great poetry. Instant acceptance of every promising artist is responsible for the bodies of the promising who died with that promise unfulfilled that strew the literary history of the twenties.

No one loved adulation more than did Vachel Lindsay, and no artist has ever seen more clearly that he was being ruined by it. He lived for his audience; he loved reciting his poetry, he loved the applause that he always got, and yet he knew that applause was his poetic destruction. Unable to deny himself the temporary pleasure, he saw his stream of inspiration dwindle, die, while helplessly he bemoaned the conflict within him. No one has seen more clearly the necessity for discontent, an ideal and the quietness in which to pursue it.

By chance the record of his self-analysis exists. In 1923-24 Lindsay was resident at Gulf Park College. There he met a young girl, not yet twenty, whom he worshipped. A portrait of her done at Gulf Park shows how still, serene, and self-contained she was, how candidly the blue eyes looked out upon the world. She became the living symbol to Lindsay of the truth, the idea, which he was seeking, simplicity, eternal youth, eternal beauty. To her in long, tortured epistles he poured out his troubles. Because his trouble was that of every American artist, and because he saw so clearly his own defeat, and its cause, those portions of these letters dealing with this question deserve careful consideration.

Fame in America is mere notoriety; nowadays many a college student has never heard of Vachel Lindsay, but from 1912 until his death in 1931, he was a household word. Everybody had read his "General William Booth Enters Heaven,"

> Booth led boldly with his big bass drum—
> (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Before the publication of the Booth poem in 1912, in the magazine *Poetry,* he was an unrecognized, restless, discontented tramp, wandering briefly on foot from Florida to Indiana, from Indiana to California, with a hasty voyage to Europe and some studying sandwiched in between. From 1912 he wrote what he wanted, what he wrote was published, and audiences were his without his asking. He was a success. The Springfield, Illinois boy, the peculiar Lindsay boy for whom his parents and the town apologized, was a genius. Naturally, Lindsay revelled in his fame. He writes of a trivial kindness. "I shook all over with excitement and ecstasy that anyone would really be good to me and take care of me. I had been treated as 'peculiar' by my dearest friends till I

(*Continued on page* 18)

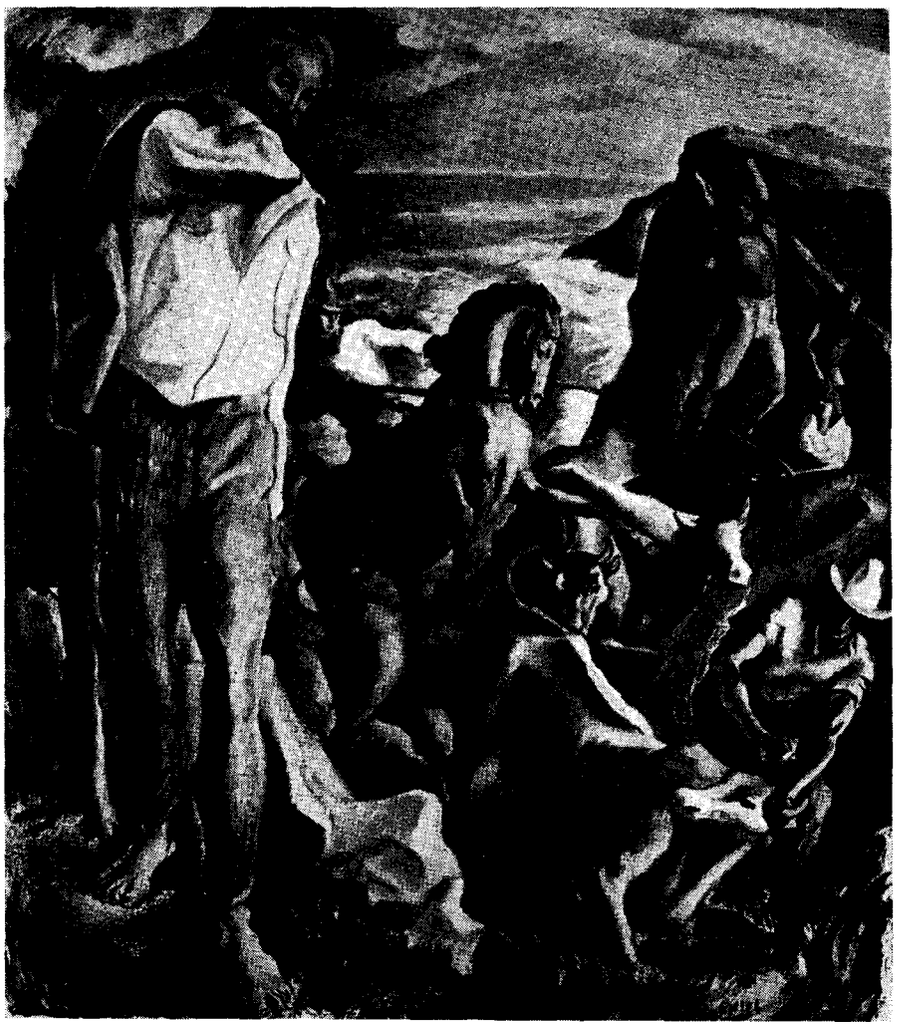

Illustration by Lewis C. Daniel for "Leaves of Grass" published by Doubleday, Doran.

"Walt Whitman was only a pretended troubadour . . . "

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POETRY AND THE RADIO

IN the late decades of the last century, when muscular Christianity was a slogan and social consciousness was struggling to a lusty activity in the halls of university settlements, poetry was a fireside companion. Mother, doing the family mending in the light of the student's lamp, would draw her needle in and out her fabric to the lines of Tennyson or Browning, read aloud by Father or one of the older children. The magazines on the library table contained the latest verses of writers whose personalities and pictures lent zest to pages in which at long last English novelists were being serialized with benefit of copyright. Commencement platforms resounded to dramatic renditions of "Marmion" or "Horatius at the Bridge" or "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," while chubby youngsters in the classrooms intoned "Shoot, if you must this old gray head," or "How well I remember the scenes of my childhood." Poetry was domesticated, and even lovers thought an evening well spent in reading together the latest contributions of their favorite poets. Just what happened to deprive poetry of its wide estate in more recent years is difficult to analyze.

For one thing, the times are more crowded. The auto, the radio, the movie all compete with the book for the leisure of the family circle. Restlessness is the mark of the age and a hundred instrumentalities exist to serve it. In the days when locomotion was difficult and commercial entertainment not easily accessible, young and old alike sought companionship and diversion in reading societies and literary gatherings. Witness the Browning societies which peppered the land. Our age has lost patience with such mild amusement. Its mood of seriousness has detracted from the potency of poetry by seeking to enlist it as an ally in its crusade to awaken the social conscience and in its effort to strip the cloak from realities. Poetry as a source of esthetic enjoyment or spiritual refreshment has been swamped in the new concern with reflecting not beauty or love, heroism or delight, but the ugliness under the outward seeming of beauty and the economic misery back of the pageant of daily living. The so-called Renaissance of poetry in America, for all the bustle and stir it created during the war and post-war years, began to lose popular appeal as it took on propagandist import. That, and the interest which poetry began to take in the abstract, along with the abuse to which it was subjected by the scribblers who thought all that was required for the writing of free verse was an arrangement of sentences according to certain forms, robbed it of the ability to thrill which is of the very essence of true poetry.

There are signs, however, of a recrudescence of interest in poetry. At least one program is at present on the air which is eliciting a wide response to its offerings, and there have been special broadcasts of poetic drama which have been highly successful. The radio, indeed, should be a potent instrument for the reestablishment of delight in poetry. For here is a means by which verse can be given full impact. Voice and manner can invest it with a warmth and effectiveness which print alone may not convey to the uninitiate. Good judgment in selection of material and competent recitation may well make poetry moving and exciting to the millions in the radio public. All power to the broadcasters.

A. L.

May-June, 1940

By Robinson Jeffers

FORESEEN for so many years: these evils, this monstrous violence, these massive agonies: no easier to bear.
We saw them with slow stone strides approach, everyone saw them; we closed our eyes against them, we looked
And they had come nearer. We ate and drank and slept, they came nearer. Sometimes we laughed, they were nearer. Now
They are here. And now a blind man foresees what follows them: degradation, famine, recovery and so forth, and the
Epidemic manias: but not enough death to serve us, not enough death. It would be better for men
To be few and live far apart, where none could infect another; then slowly the sanity of field and mountain
And the cold ocean and glittering stars might enter their minds.

Another
dream, another dream.
We shall have to accept certain limitations
In future, and abandon some humane dreams; only hard-minded, sleepless and realist can ride this rock-slide
To new fields down the dark mountain; and we shall have to perceive that these insanities are normal;
We shall have to perceive that battle is a burning flower or like a huge music, and the dive-bomber's screaming orgasm
As beautiful as other passions; and that death and life are not serious alternatives. One has known all these things
For many years: there is greater and darker to know
In the next hundred.

And why do you cry, my dear, why do you cry?
It is all in the whirling circles of time.
If millions are born millions must die,
If England goes down and Germany up
The stronger dog will still be on top,
All in the turning of time.
If civilization goes down, that
Would be an event to contemplate.
It will not be in our time, alas my dear,
It will not be in our time.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Culture Today

SIR:—That pretty pink piece that Mr. Frederick Lewis Allen wrote for you about "Our Widening American Culture" (*SRL*, June 29) has made me wonder whether he was talking about today or the yesterday with which he is so familiar.

I don't agree with what Mr. Allen seems to think that culture is, since to me it means considerably more than the ability to enjoy and produce music and literature and art and even brightly colored kitchens. But even taking Mr. Allen's definition for the purpose of the argument the general situation doesn't seem to emit quite such a rosy glow.

Mr. Allen could have become aware of a prime fact in American thought at the moment by merely looking at a copy of the morning paper. Or if he has waited this long he might have turned a few pages in the same issue of *SRL* and seen you whistling up courage with Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Surely a minute investigation would convince him that a war psychology is creeping up on us. Whether or not we get into an actual state of war our minds at least have started in that direction. That enormous fact is bound to play hell with the culture we have, let alone the chances of widening it.

Take painting. During the past eight years the United States has produced painting which in quality and quantity has surpassed anything we have ever produced. That period will always rank extremely high in the history of American art. It may do better than that; it may rank as a first rate period in world art. We ourselves don't know yet how actually good this work has been since we haven't had time to digest it, or even look at most of it.

Already the fangs of war have gone to work on painting. In the first place the media through which most Americans have become familiar with paintings, newspapers and magazines, are devoting considerably less space to the explanation and exhibition of works of art.

In the second place most Americans won't buy such luxuries as paintings in periods during which the future is uncertain. And the WPA, which deserves major credit for this astounding development of art, isn't what it was. I don't know how Mr. Allen feels about eating but all the artists I know find it necessary.

In the third place there may come a time—I hope it never does—when someone will ask a painter what he is doing for his country and he will reply "I am painting a picture for my country" and it may, in fact, be the greatest thing he could do for his country but then, to be sure, no one will believe him.

"I'd Like to Speak to 'The Editorial We'"

No more than they will believe the young men and women who will say that they are writing novels and poems and plays for their country. Unless, of course, those poems and plays are not poems and plays really but propaganda.

I remember very slightly some poems that were written for propaganda purposes by Wordsworth and Coleridge and some others at the time of the French revolution. They were propaganda then and still are except that most of them have lost their point. And who reads them except students?

I read "Pollyanna," too, and so I can say that maybe this won't be as bad as it looks as if it will.

CHARLES ALLDREDGE.

Charleston, South Carolina

"Gone Glimmering"

SIR:—When I was a youngster I heard not infrequently (oftener then than now) the phrase "gone glimmering" as a slang answer to the question: Where is he (or it) now? The phrase, with a little higher social standing than "gone where the woodbine twineth," meant about the same thing. It conveys clearly enough the intended meaning, "disappeared completely"; but does so as a gesture, more like a wave of the hand than as a sequence of ideas in the mind. That is, the phrase, is frozen, and has a meaning that is different from the sum of the meanings of the two words separately.

The etymology of a frozen phrase is as interesting as the etymology of a word, and is much less likely to have found its way into the dictionaries. The origin of "gone glimmering" can be tracked down precisely, I think; and for it, as for the etymology of "phenagle," I am indebted to Lord Byron's poetry.

The second canto of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" opens with an apostrophe to Minerva and the heroes of ancient Greece. The first three lines of the second stanza are:

> Ancient of days! august Athena! where,
> Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?
> Gone — glimmering through the dream of things that were.

In the verse context "glimmering" belongs with the last of the line, makes abundant good sense so, and suggests pathos; slang tore it thence, affixed it to "gone," making much less sense but injecting an intimation of the comic, and built a frozen phrase.

R. H. GRIFFITH.

Austin, Texas.

Triple Negative

SIR:—I am distressed to find my unfavorite English locution crawling toward respectability in your pages. In the issue of July 13, (page 6, column 1) Harold Stearns, reviewing Gertrude Stein's "Paris France" writes, "I could not help but think of this." . . . It doesn't take a grammarian to see that this nonsensical triple negative is the ugly offspring of confusion between "I could not help" and "I could not but."

DOROTHY F. ROLPH.

New York City.

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Poets New and Old

DUDLEY FITTS

THE POET IN NEW YORK, AND OTHER POEMS. By Federico García Lorca. Translated by Rolfe Humphries. New York: W. W. Norton. 1940. 209 *pp.* $2.50.

OF the recent attempts to translate Lorca into English this is the most nearly successful. So qualified a statement necessarily sounds like faint praise: actually, it is high praise. One has only to look back at the well-meant blundering of the Spender-Gili translations, or at *New Directions'* schoolboy howler version of "Bodas de Sangre," to be aware of how great a distance separates them from Rolfe Humphries's work, the work of a sensitive poet in his own right who has an advantage that the others apparently lacked—an understanding of Spanish rhythms and the miracles that Lorca wrought with them. If the lyrics in this book come off less well than longer poems in cadenced verse, it is simply because the ways of English are not the ways of Spanish. When Mr. Humphries found himself up against such an angelic and inconsequential harmony as

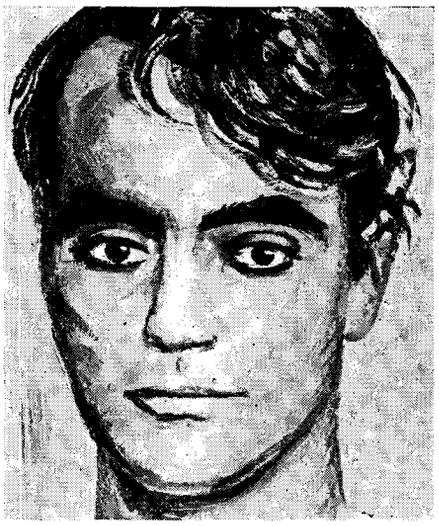
Ay, amor,
bajo el naranjo en flor!

there was nothing in English for it, if he was to be faithful, but the far from angelic harmony of

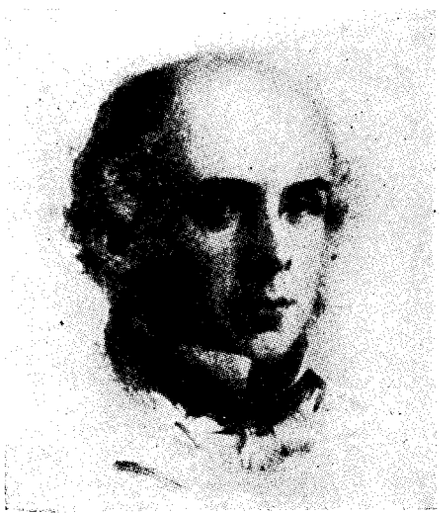
Ah, Love,
Under the orange blossom!

And there went Lorca, jingle of a suburban wedding, and no help for it. Page after page of the briefer poems and the gypsy romances displays the inevitable coarsening of the original texture, but it is greatly to the translator's credit that this coarsening is seldom complete.

The longer poems are at once more workable and less tantalizing. Lorca was given to surréalisme; and while a comparable effect can be got in translating this kind of verse, the straining and audacity are somehow intensified, and the subtleties have a tendency to fossilize. Nevertheless there are whole poems, especially in the "Calles y Sueños" of "Poeta en Nueva York," that are superb in Mr. Humphries's English. And the "Oda a Walt Whitman," here for the first time translated in its entirety, is in itself enough to make the book memorable.



Federico Garcia Lorca



Arthur Hugh Clough

Matthew Arnold

TEN VICTORIAN POETS. By F. L. Lucas. Cambridge: University Press. (New York: The Macmillan Co.) 1940. 199 *pp.* $2.50.

THE Ten are Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Clough, Patmore, the Rossettis, Morris, Swinburne, and Hardy. To each is devoted a gentle essay of appreciation; the correct things are said with correct grace ("This joining of youth and death may seem a paradox; yet it is perfectly natural and inevitable that youth, in its very fullness of joy and life, should resent with wild intensity the sorrow and mortality it sees darkening the horizons of its bright new world"), the suave voice purrs on unchallenged except for the tinkle of invisible teacups, and the whole performance is as prettily meaningless as one of the verses which Professor Lucas cites as poetical touchstones:

Les violons vibrant derrière les collines.

Originally, these were radio talks for the B. B. C.; and it might be asked what more could be accomplished, on such an occasion, than this amiable rephrasing of platitudes. I should answer: lots more. One might, for example, attend less to biographical gossip and more to the texts of the poems. It is true that Professor Lucas quotes verses extensively; but he almost never does so with more than a quasi-anectodal purpose; yet even for a radio audience, the simple analysis of diction—of such a typical Swinburne atrocity, say, as

Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales—

would seem to be more useful than such pronouncements (opening, it would seem, in brogue) as "The heart of him is in 'Atalanta' and 'Poems and Ballads'; after thirty, his bloom begins to fade." But of active criticism there is nothing. These talks are the literary equivalent of the music-appreciation talks that inform us that Mozart took his chocolate in bed, that Beethoven did or did not hear Fate knocking at the door, that Papa Haydn smiled like the Cheshire Cat under whatever conditions, that Bach was frequently sad, but also frequently gay. If you like this sort of thing, buy the book. It is, as they say, "urbane."

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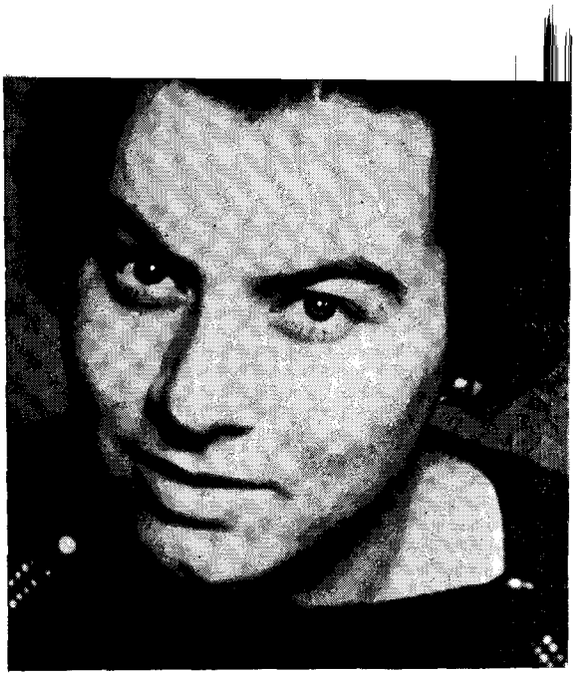
The Language of Muriel Rukeyser

LOUIS UNTERMEYER



Nancy Naumbe

Muriel Rukeyser

IF Muriel Rukeyser is—as I believe she is—the most inventive and challenging poet of the generation which has not yet reached thirty, it is because of her provocative language fully as much as because of her audacious ideas. The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, but it is the accent which insures poetry's surviving genius. The commonplaces of idea are the same in "The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam" and "The Shropshire Lad"—a futile hedonism, a preoccupation with impermanent pleasure, drink, and death—but it is the language, and only the language, which distinguishes the Victorian Fitzgerald from the Victorian Housman. The religious intensities of Francis Thompson and Gerard Manley Hopkins succeeded in fusing minuteness of observation and hugeness of vision, lifting the trivial to the plane of the tremendous; but Thompson is archaically Thompson and Hopkins is contemporaneously Hopkins not by each poet's way of seeing, but by his way of saying.

Muriel Rukeyser, though only a few months more than twenty-six, has already had her disciples and her detractors. Her three volumes have disclosed an accumulating strength of purpose and an increasing originality of idiom. She first challenged attention with "Theory of Flight," published when she was twenty-one, a volume which is still the most distinguished in the annual Yale Series of Younger Poets. "Theory of Flight" pronounced a new symbolism as well as a new speech. The style was swift, abrupt, syncopated; it matched the speed of the strepitant post-war world, the crazy energy of murderous machines, the "intolerable contradiction" of flight. The airplane, the gyroscope, the jobless miners were employed unselfconsciously by one whose "Poem Out of Childhood" calmy declared:

> Prinzip's year bore us: see us turning at breast
> quietly while the air throbs over Sarajevo
> after the mechanic laugh of that bullet.

For her the images of war and industry are all too natural; for the city girl the early Mack truck pushing around the corner, tires hissing on the washed asphalt, is a more valid symbol of dawn than the ship of sunrise stranded on the eastern rims or the lark at heaven's gate. Kenneth Burke, pointing out her combination of aloofness and observation ("from a distance she surveys the cruelty and arduousness of the contemporary world") shrewdly likens her attitude to the educative passing of Dante through Hell, and in the progress "it is the airplane motor that takes over the protective role of Virgil as her guide." It is significant that the tensity of feeling and the intensity of utterance pronounced in "The Tunnel" and "The Structure of the Plane," followed a course at the Roosevelt School of the Air, and that the curiously choked, painfully mature "Effort at Speech between Two People," one of the period's most moving love poems, was written when Muriel Rukeyser was still an undergraduate.

EVEN at this time the vocabulary was pointedly her own. The opening poem in "Theory of Flight," one of the preparatory records mingling fragments of emotion and experience, constructed a person and a period. Kaleidoscoping class-room lessons and newspaper headlines ("Not Angles, angels. . . . Not Sappho, Sacco") the young poet disclosed herself, "listening at dead doors, ricochetting from thought to thought." The emotion, too powerful for its object, fumbled its way through the verse, but the language was certain of itself. Here, in exact and yet allusive phrases, is the child "fruitily sentimental"; the adolescent standing at a sunset window "hoping toward death"; the young lover asking vainly for understanding beyond the flesh ("Fist my mind in your hand"); the lonely and believing spirit, "homing in no hand nor breast nor sex," believing in the challenge and renewal of values which is the renewal of the world.

After the publication of her first volume, Miss Rukeyser probed those values. She went to Spain, worked with the Spanish Medical Bureau, returned and explored the U. S. highway from Maine southward. The native exploration was chiefly in terms of human values, of the conditions which have particularized the Atlantic seaboard, and the direct influence of places upon people. The results showed in her second volume, "U. S. 1," as an assimilation of influences and an effort at adult integration. Echoes could be recognized—chiefly reminders of Hart Crane and W. H. Auden—but her own voice came through with conviction if not always with clarity. Hart Crane, searching for a central structure to integrate his disordered energy, found Brooklyn Bridge; so Muriel Rukeyser, travelling U. S. 1, found Gauley Bridge. The main feature of her second volume is "The Book of the Dead," a study of a place, a many angled portrait which is also a portent. Miss Rukeyser shows the West Virginia village riddled with silicosis, coughing to death, while the huge power plant (the reason for which it is dying) stands idle, empty, impotent. Twenty poems are used to illumine the picture from as many points of view: the statement of a social worker, the meditation of a locomotive engineer, a committee report, a letter from a driller, an X-ray diagnosis, the spirit of a landscape, controversy among doctors, the voice of the dam, Senate investigation, a bill of particulars, stock-market quotations—and, fusing them all into a bold pattern, the vigorous invention of the poet herself.

Inventiveness and daring are cumulatively evidenced in the rest of "U. S. 1": in that nightmare parable of responsibility and irresponsible temperament, "The Cruise," and the short poems in "Night-Music." Typical of

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her condensed diction—a suggestive shorthand—are the anguished "The Child Asleep," the reminiscent and ironic "More of a Corpse than a Woman," the half-dissonant, half-melodic "The Drowning Young Man," and "Boy with His Hair Cut Short." This last, which could not possibly have been written in any but a period of disordered economics, illustrates Miss Rukeyser's method. The opening lines set the scene: the cheap rented room, the harsh electric light, the bleak depression, the boy out of work, the sister trying to make him more presentable, "erasing the failure of weeks with level fingers."

He sits at the table, head down, the young clear neck exposed,
watching the drugstore sign from the tail of his eye;
tattoo, neon, until the eye blears, while his
solicitous tall sister, simple in blue, bending
behind him, cuts his hair with her cheap shears.

The arrow's electric red always reaches its mark,
successful neon! He coughs, impressed by that precision.
His child's forehead, forever protected by his cap,
is bleached against the lamplight as he turns head
and steadies to let the snippets drop. . . .

He sees his decent suit laid out, new-pressed,
his carfare on the shelf. He lets his head fall, meeting
her earnest hopeless look, seeing the sharp blades splitting,
the darkened room, the impersonal sign, her motion,
the blue vein, bright on her temple, pitifully beating.

Although these three verses are severed from the poem, they indicate the tone as well as the technique. For the craftsman, there is the deceptive prose statement varied by brusque image and casual rhyme; the alternation of abstractions and concrete objects; the overhanging sense of personal failure contrasted with the impersonal and brilliant sign, the always "successful" neon. But it does not take a craftsman to appreciate the quietly charged mood, the unresolved drama, the articulate communication of small details and their huge implications.

Miss Rukeyser's intentness and originality progress further in her third volume, "A Turning Wind." Written between her twenty-third and twenty-fifth years, the book indicates continuing growth and complexity. Some critics identified the complexity with confusion; they complained of her "baffling style," the uncertainties of her "metaphysical soul-searching." A poet turned purist objected to her "indiscriminate scrambling of tenses and inexactness of pronominal references" as well as "the unrelieved bombardment of fragmentary phrases and half-sentences." Selden Rodman, who admired "Theory of Flight" as a "poetic synthesis of symbolism and socialism," reviewed the new book in *The Saturday Review of Literature* and lamented that Miss Rukeyser "steeping herself in Kenneth Burke, Jacob Boehme, Willard Gibbs, and Donald Mackenzie, has written a book so dense with symbols that extracting the poetry on any one page is a scholar's problem."

There was something to be said for the reviewers too busy to wait for a poem to establish more than its tune. But there was little excuse for the impatience of those who know that poetry does not yield more than its surface music and outer meaning upon first reading. The complexities were obvious: the shifting tempi, the abrupt change of tense and action, the overcrowded lines, the hurtling emotion in runaway fever, the too swiftly juxtaposed images and allusive symbols. But the strength of her conviction and the power of its communication was equally obvious. Integrity is perceived even before it is understood; the meaning, sometimes muffled by her very rush of words, declares itself finally and fully. It rises eloquently from "Judith," poignantly evoking the dark woman at the telephone; from "Reading Time: 1 Minute, 26 Seconds," that definition of the extension of Being as poetry, the "moment of proof"; from "The Island," which synthesizes the England of Shropshire hedges and "a loosely practiced piano in Chester shaking its scales loose over the city," gooseberry lawns and "tombstones set out to pasture in fat grasses," and Invictus and colonels with undershot jaws and "the actress with the bulletproof face"; from the summoned terror of "Seventh Avenue," a dream by Breughel in his most savage drawing of abnormalities.

But Miss Rukeyser was seeking larger themes, more permanent values. A film based on "Gauley Bridge" was in the making, and a new set of poems which were to be a reversal of the Gauley Bridge tragedy. In "Gauley Bridge" the poet was absorbed by the victims of process; in the five "Lives" which concluded "A Turning Wind" she attempted to track down the sources of power, the creative founders of the processes themselves. New England was the scene; the characters ranged from the embodiments of the most pure imagination to the most eclectic. The "Lives" portrayed (or, rather, apotheosized) Gibbs, the physicist to whom mathematics was the universal language; Ryder, the

The Time Is Now

By Max Lerner

DYNASTS have been and vanished in the dream
dreamers have forged the shackles for our hearts
all things crisscross in agony

why should those who have not known love cry out in sleep
I sang last night with a girl and some boys
and then we talked old myths and unimagined newness
they were like sheaves cut down before the sun's ripeness
and I who loved them was caught in the deep

of their despair
o men of my time
the world we give them is shrunk to a monstrous cipher
the world we hand on is an addled miscarried world
if it is fit for a puny conqueror's will

o men who act
the time we say is growing short
not so the time is too late to grow short
the time is now

spell out the message to history use what code
you will bury old books to write new
flash the code in words that steel our gentleness
build it into lathes pour it in metal
write it on the assembly line trace it in the sky

are we confederate to a footling age
are we the heirs of a declining dream

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painter whose boulders were "eyes washed by the drift of ocean"; John Jay Chapman, the fiery correspondent and frustrated poet; Charles Ives, the pioneering American composer "railing against the fake sonorities"; and Ann Burlak, agitator and organizer. Miss Rukeyser clarified her position in an introductory note:

> Now in our time, many of the sources of power are obscured again, or vulgarized and locked out. They are our inheritance, part of our common property, I believe, among the techniques of living. Using as material studies in symbolism, studies in individual lives, and the experience to which I have been open, I have hoped to indicate some of the valid sources of power which have come down to us. I have wished to use such material as document, in much the same way that newspapers or congressional reports or broadcasts may be used.

While she was writing the "Lives" Miss Rukeyser experimented with photographs (chiefly for *Life* and *Coronet*) in unsatisfactory trials to do what she still hopes to do: work out a process for a series of photographs whose running line of captions will provide a line of unity for the whole sequence. "A Turning Wind" was finished September 1, 1939, on the very outbreak of war, and the book is full of the war to come. Born at the beginning of the first World War, it seems that Miss Rukeyser has been writing of little else but the threat to all science and culture and the works of peace. Now again in the midst of war, she would write of the far-off possible peace and the next science: the science of the reconstruction of countries, a revolutionary science which not only Europe but the whole world will have to work on together.

It is this which leads her to the prose on which she is engaged, a biography of the physicist Gibbs. To her, the life of Gibbs is a clue to much that has happened and is happening now: the stifling of the spirit of free inquiry, the deadening of pure imagination in a period that demands only the immediate and practical. Closely linked to this, and continuing the series "Lives," is "The Soul and Body of John Brown," an unfinished draft of which appeared in *Poetry* for June. It is, perhaps, Miss Rukeyser's most important work up to date, for it embodies not only her credo and reveals her style at its richest, but it serves as a manifesto for her generation.

The motto of "The Soul and Body of John Brown" is from Joel: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." It is a quotation which has a terrible choice of meanings, for the chapter from which it is taken is a prologue to the Day of Judgment—and it is our day which will be judged, judged by our own multitudes "in the valley of decision." The symbolism is emphasized with the entry of another Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel; for Ezekiel, thundering about the doom of nations, foretold the end of slavery and foreshadowed a spiritual resurrection. Joel . . . Ezekiel . . . John Brown . . . Miss Rukeyser synthesizes their apocalyptic visions, repudiates the self-willed doom of the appeasers and defeatists, faces the death-wish, and, feeling the line of the past, urges more freedom. She calls valiantly for reawakened life. The cry is to the spirit of Joel-John Brown-Ezekiel: "Threaten us alive!" Brown's image is shown "a streaming meteor in the blackened air . . . a fanatic beacon of fierceness leaping to meet them there." Whereupon the poet, imposing 1940 upon 1859, grimly adds:

> The trial of heroes follows their execution. The striding
> wind of nations with new rain, new lightning,
> destroying in magnificent noon shining straight down
> the fiery pines. Brown wanted freedom. Could not himself be free
> until more grace reached a corroded world.

With this statement as a key, the poem becomes a chorale in contrasting voices. Even the epithets reveal the counterpoint: "enemies who reply in smiles, mild slavers, moderate whores." The poet as Brown sees his tree growing to leap the mountains —"not mountains, but men and women sleeping." ("If I tell them the truth, they will say I speak in symbols.") The poet as poet pities the people "blind to the sun-storming image in their eyes."

> Spring: the great hieroglyph: the mighty, whose first hour
> collects the winter invalids, whose cloudless
> pastures train swarms of mutable apple-trees
> to blond delusions of light, the touch of whiter
> more memorable breasts each evening, the resistant
> male shoulders riding under cold terrible eyes.

So, in a steadily mounting chorus of contrasted voices, the poem proceeds to its affirmative climax. The prophetic voices, echoed in the buzz of guitars (a truer symbol of American song than the traditional lute or classic lyre) call for more life: "in all the harm, calling . . . challenging this hatred—

> a wish to be again
> threatened alive, in agonies of decision,
> part of our nation, of a fanatic sun.

It is the "agonies of decision" which Miss Rukeyser expresses for more than her own generation. Living in a divided democracy, she dreads the step forward into disciplined militant unity and the step backward which will forfeit all our gains. Instinctively pacifist, she is against everything in any organization which represents the brutal life of enforced regimentation and national slavery. (She remembers the poet Lorca, who could have been murdered by both the Spanish republicans and fascists—who figuratively *was* murdered by both parties, since neither could protect him.) Thus she is against war, conscription, the forcing of others into war. Yet she knows what she must fight; she is unconditionally pledged to oppose Hitlerism and preserve civil liberties. Meanwhile, in the midst of desperate remedies and clamoring negatives, she affirms the life of people and the life of poetry—the life of the spirit giving all processes and inventions, the creative life which is the double answer to living slavery and to the wish for quick escape, comforting death. She affirms:

> That climax when the brain acknowledges the world,
> all values extended into the blood awake.

Old Rhyme

Varied to suit the British order that bells must ring only for Air Raids.

By Phyllis McGinley

LOUDLY while the bombs rain down
Ring the bells of London Town.

Watch out below
Cries the great bell at Bow.

You make a fine target
Say the bells of St. Marg'et.

The horsemen ride palely
Call the bells of Old Bailey.

No shelter for miles
Toll the bells of St. Giles.

Both poor men and rich,
Warn the bells at Fleetditch,

With horror must grapple,
Ring the bells at Whitechapel.

Flee fast as you can,
Shriek the bells of St. Anne,

The planes are still fleeter
Mourn the bells of St. Peter.

There's blood in the dawn
Say the bells of St. John.

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Poetry and Democracy

SELDEN RODMAN

LONG before Hitler's armies knocked the last defensive props from under the old order in France, artists in every country had given their warning. More sensitive than most to the creeping paralysis of laissez-faire, the irresponsible individualism that was beginning to atomize society from the top down, they gave their readers a rather terrifying series of pictures of the breakdown of Western civilization. Eliot in "The Waste-land," Joyce in "Ulysses," Pound in his "Cantos," Thomas Mann in "The Magic Mountain," Picasso in his dissociated abstractions and concretions —to mention a few of the major figures—all testified to the same impending catastrophe. The curious fact, and the question we must now ask ourselves, is: Why were the prophets not listened to in their own countries? Why, in most cases, were the poets not even read?

The answer would seem to lie in two directions. In the first place these great artists, and the lesser ones who voiced the same warning, for the most part spoke the language and used the symbolism of the declining order itself. The language had become so refined that few outside the circle of the artists any longer understood what it meant. The symbols, mostly biblical or classical in their origin, if grasped at all, were assumed to refer to a kind of isolated literary world that didn't have any connection with the common man's life. There was nothing in any of these works about tractors, baseball, pool rooms, political meetings, offices, filling stations, roller-coasters, or taxes. If the works alluded to "life" and "death," thought the reader, it certainly couldn't be *his* life or death.

The second factor was that the testimony of the poets was negative. The common man, certainly the average intelligent reader in these depressed nations, agreed, however subconsciously, that old values and old institutions were passing into their decline. Did the new art throw any light into this darkness? Did the new artists proclaim new values? Was their world more inspiring than his? On the contrary. They were experts in despair, these artists: Molly Bloom might say Yes to her own redeeming sensuality; Hans Castorp might finally stumble singing toward the bursting shell; Eliot might conclude his masterpiece with the word "peace" in Sanskrit; but the total picture was of a gloom more unrelieved and a doom more final than even life, with its vague hopes and occasional triumphs, its work that could be meaningful in itself, its vilified "escapes."

There were exceptions, of course. Fascism was an answer to this kind of world; a brutal answer, but still an answer. And the prophets of fascism, speaking in a language that could be understood, came well in advance of the Leaders. Wagner, through his writing as well as his music, gave every level of several generations of Germans something to think about. D'Annunzio, years before the March on Rome, was probably the most widely-read Italian since Dante. Knut Hamsun's later works were familiar to the Norwegian peasantry long before Quisling spiked their guns. Even so ambiguous and sophisticated a prophet of "dark gods" as D. H. Lawrence was so anxious to win converts to his ideas that he finally resorted to writing a popular "shocker." The aged Yeats, though too great an artist ever to so debase his art, was obsessed enough with the need for violence to find a language of "public speech" in which to convey it.

Marxism was another kind of answer. Since Marxism has dominated not only the new poets of the past decade but most of the new novelists as well, certain spiteful critics are rather nettled to find small enthusiasm for the coalition of Red and Brown dictatorships among the writers. The reason for this, of course, is that communism with a small "c," the classless society, was—and is—a noble ideal. Social planning, which Russia for a number of years scouted alone, was—and is—an economic necessity. The writers, though not many of them inquired into the effect which the means-employed were bound to have on the desired-end, sensed this. However similar the goals might be to which the fascists were travelling, it was perfectly clear in the case of fascism, and from the beginning, that the means were corrupt and corrupting. The Nazi-Soviet Pact, and the unprovoked assault upon one of the most progressive democratic states, therefore, was enough to convince all but the most thick-skinned Marxists that their premises must be re-examined.

THE MARXIST influence, especially on the modern poets, was both a positive and a negative one. In my opinion the negative outweighed the positive. On the positive side, the range of the poet's interest was broadened to include a class. Hitherto he had spoken vaguely for a nation, or, if discriminating, for an intellectual clique. Now, at least, he looked critically at the rulers and made an effort to identify himself with the "workers." At his side was a philosophic weapon, an impressive and comprehensive literature of social ac-

Now in the Night

By Joseph Auslander

NOW in the night when men and cannon roar
Tumultuous carnage, and the heart turns cold,
I think of poets piping Lochinvar,
The lies they tell, the bitter truths untold;
Here howls the Teuton, there he runs amok,
As in the time of Roman Tacitus,
The dying Gaul, the Briton like a rock,
Their dead heaped high between the Hun and us.

How Caesar's pride would writhe in shame to see
The haughty eagles of his legions claw
At carrion like buzzards: Italy
Sold by a strutting traitor stuffed with straw! . . .
Now in the night we wake from fitful sleep:
What have we lost? What have we left to keep?

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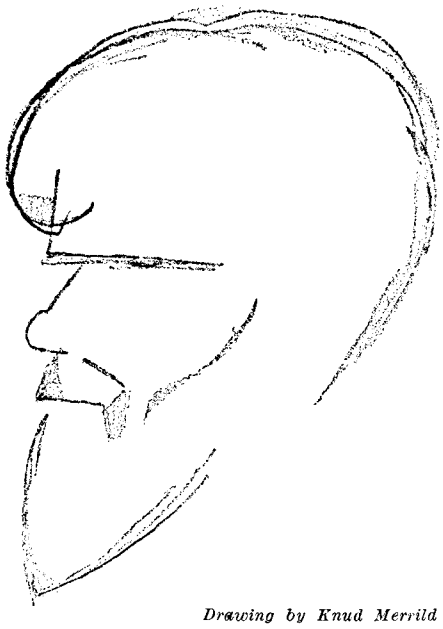
tion which, though it could apparently predict nothing, could explain everything. The new writer travelled extensively, perhaps attended meetings, and took part in strikes as a "sympathizer," documenting his work with evidence as well as feeling. "Tristram," "Renascence," and "Streets in the Moon" gave way to "The Dance of Death," "US 1," "Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City."

On the negative side, most of this Marxist-inspired writing was full of a sophistication, a privacy, and a downright snobbism that by comparison made the frank escapism of the Ivory Tower at least look intellectually honest. The phoney Hegelian metaphysics of Marxism was translated into an even phonier poetic gibberish.

The "capitalist" and the "worker," those nineteenth century abstractions which had already made a shambles of the progressive movement in postwar Europe, took their sentimental places as Devil and Saint. The technique of symbolism, already a sign-language between converts, was taken over bodily by most of the poets and made into an instrument so oblique that even the poets couldn't agree what it meant. The "worker" was spoken for, never to. And the poets were so drugged by their political mentors that even as late as 1938 a first-rank poet like W. H. Auden could write an absurd play ("On the Frontier") which, he admitted almost as soon as it was published, was based upon a complete misunderstanding of the character of the system that was shaking the world.

TO come back to Hitler and the fall of France, what have we learned? What, as poets, are we prepared to do? (It would be arrogant and futile to "demand" that anything be done; nothing that each individual does not decide for himself to do is worth much.) We are on the way to learning that democracy-without-socialism (or, if you like, democracy-plus-laissez-faire capitalism) is a weaker thing than socialism-without-democracy. Yet all but a very few of us would rather die than live under either of the prevailing forms that socialism-without-democracy has taken in Europe. Both as human beings and as writers, then, one opportunity remains open for us: we can bend our efforts to achieving socialism-plus-democracy. ("Socialism" is admittedly a bad word, but no other, not even "coöperation," has yet been invented to include the classless social order and the full utilization of productive forces which we mean.) It is my absolute conviction that no dictatorship in the world today, however mechanically "efficient," could long survive the example and



Drawing by Knud Merrild

D. H. Lawrence

the strength of such a social order.

In America there is still time, and in fact a unique opportunity, to achieve such a social order. Saluting the symbol but not the reality of democracy, legislating against obscure religious sects like Jehovah's Witnesses, deporting scape-goat labor leaders, capitulating in panic to any one of the currently fashionable and irrational mystiques of "action"—is certainly not the way. Nor is it enough merely to conscript an army, or to outmechanize the enemy. Those to whom democracy is a living and necessary thing will be willing to make sacrifices for it. If Plattsburg is filled with successful young business men, while labor, youth, and the unemployed are full of cynicism about the slogans that would enlist them as volunteers or conscript them as mercenaries—there is a reason for that. It is not enough, as Archibald MacLeish has been urging, that we renew our faith in the slogans. Faith will renew itself when democracy is meaningful for all of us. Neither slogans, nor acting upon slogans, saved France. There is no more magic in the words "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" than there was in "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité." There is as much in each slogan as there is truth behind it.

WHAT can we do, then, as writers and poets, to make democracy a dynamic and irresistible force again?

Once more let us look at the condition of modern poetry. Is there a tradition of socialized democracy on which we can build? If there is not, we will have to get to work like the prophets and poets of "bourgeois democracy"—Voltaire and Rousseau, Shelley and Byron, Hugo and Foscolo, Franklin and Whitman—and create one. The first democratic revolution was not created by politicians; the second will not be either.

Not everything in the past is dead. It never is. The ideals of the old democracy as ideals are a rich heritage. Jefferson and Lincoln have much to teach us: the destination toward which they travelled is indestructible and timeless. Whitman and Sandburg, though both are too subjective and discursive to speak "universally," nourished that heritage. Whitman's optimism and Sandburg's humility are great. From the Marxists we learn that labor (if not Labor) is sacred; that so long as any people work without dignity, to that extent all of us work without dignity; that until we live with work and among those who work, documenting our emotion with evidence, our vision can never be more than a personal one. Christianity, if stripped of the wraps of respectability and theology that insulate its revolutionary core, might teach us these things even more intensely. Symbolism, if we use it as a means and not as an end, teaches us that there is more evocative power in a word with several associations than in a word with only one. Even Jeffers, if we can read his narrative poems without succumbing to his nihilism, teaches us that a story told with pow-

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er is more powerful than the most powerful didactic statement.

Our first aim should be clarity. Poetry by "dissociation," the stream of consciousness, "surrealism," may still find a few devotees, but these can never provide the basis for a poetry of democracy. Few of us, even with long familiarity, "get" everything that Shakespeare put into "Hamlet," but anybody can get enough out of even a single showing to want to see it or read it again. Better for poetry, and possibly even for the poets, to fall short of perfection in essaying an ambitious theme, than to refine a cameo. The forms of narrative and dramatic poetry, whether for the stage, the screen, the airways, or the bedchamber, must be mastered. On one level at least—the level of the story, the action, the general purpose—the poem or play must be perfectly clear to anyone with normal intelligence.

But writing lucidly, ambitiously, and dramatically will only be a beginning; they are not enough in themselves. An objective, supra-personal poetry can only be written by poets with deep roots in the material and way of life they are celebrating. We should know our folkways, but we cannot write folk poetry. It is too late. Those who try to be "naive" will be "quaint"; those who strain after ancient virtues will succeed only in being antique. Neither "regionalism" nor "nationalism" will be sufficient. The modern world is too interdependent; poetry can have no Maginot Line. To know oneself, one must know one's family. To know one's family, one must know one's region. To know one's region, one must know one's country. And to know one's country, one must know the world.

Poets who have succeeded in speaking for their time, and to the world, have been more than poets. Aeschylus was a soldier. Dante and Milton were statesmen. Shakespeare was an actor and stage-manager. Goethe, among many professions, was a biologist. Donne wrote his greatest poetry after he became Dean of St. Paul's. It was with Alexander Pope that literature for the first time became a profession; with the romantics and symbolists a hundred years later it was on the way to becoming a vice. Rimbaud, who gave up a promising career as a poet for East African trade and gun-smuggling in 1875, was the first to rebel against this ingrown preciosity. But he was too unbalanced by the tension of his conflict to go on writing.

There is none of this conflict between action and contemplation in sculpture. A good architect knows every inch of the ground before he retires to his drafting board. Painting is hard work. Even composing demands mastery—physical mastery—of one or more instruments. Is there any conceivable reason why writing, which takes in more territory than any of the other arts, should be confined to pushing a pen? Would Thomas Wolfe, if he had had any other outlet for his vast energy, have filled shelves of notebooks, not to mention his novels, with such a furious formless outpouring?

But there are other reasons why the poet should be a specialist in something beside his poetry. A Virgil, a Dante, even a Goethe could understand the work of his world as a whole. Today the world is too complex. The attempt to understand it, as it were from the top down, can only lead to confusion, to further "dissociation" in the mind of the artist. The poet must understand some part of his world well. He must be of his world in order to speak compellingly either for it or to it.

There is a hint of it in Eliot's plays, though Eliot can never belong to our world. There is more than a hint of it in MacLeish's epoch-making radio scripts. It is suggested in the method of Louis MacNeice's "Autumn Journal": the parts about his work in the Greek classroom and his trip to Spain are the best parts. I see it in the unpublished poetry of A. Fleming MacLiesh. I see it in James Agee's tremendous "Three Tenant Families," to be published this fall.

What I am here trying to formulate as a theory, I have myself endeavored to practise. I have been working on a narrative poem, "The Airmen," for some time. Its value, I feel, will depend to no small extent on how well my understanding of history, my ability to report, and my instruction in flying have equipped me for the job. I know it would be better if I were a better social philosopher, a better reporter, and a better flyer.

Antoine de St. Exupéry, whose life and writings are the living record of our search for a new world, loved the earth but was far enough removed from it to speak with complete integrity. The message he flashed may be capable of guiding us out of the Cone of Silence:

> Moral greatness consists in responsibility. . . . To feel ashamed at the sight of what seems unmerited misery. . . . To take pride in victory won by comrades. . . . To feel one is contributing to the building of a world. If death comes, hooked by a cliff, it will not be for the tradesman but in obedience which enobles sacks of mail once stowed. . . . Loving not danger but life, renouncing the "choice" of what night club to visit. . . . Love is not in gazing at each other but outward together in the same direction.

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Lines for a Little House

By Thomas Caldecot Chubb

HERE where the clean and salty strong sea breeze
Blows steadily and sure, day-long, night-long,
Making, in feathery, gale-wrenched tamarisk trees
Slow tranquil speaking, slow and soothing song;
Here under the white and healing Bermudian sun,
Here in the warm and soft Bermudian rain,
Ease dwelleth; calm a fine abode hath won;
Life is excellent; life is whole and sane.
And hospitality and warm-hearted grace
The guardians are of this Hesperides.
O ye great gods, be good to this good place.
Grant it prosperity. Grant it ever peace.

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POETRY IN AMERICA

(*Continued from page 4*)

that is not quite so simple as reading prose. But that is no reason why you should give it up as a great mystery. The best poetry says something clearly. The rhythm, the rhyme, and the metre—though in a great deal of modern poetry you will not find them—are designed to enhance the expression. In fact rhythm is the foundation of all human expression, as it exists in the beating of your heart. And more and more, I believe, that modern poets are returning to contact with the public, are turning back from the blind alley and dead end into which overintellectualization led them, and desiring to be understood by the people. I think that is the latest trend, and high time too.

Also, in the last twenty years in this country, there has been evident a desire on the part of the poets to explore human history, and particularly American history, in verse; to tell stories about this world, and this country, either of the past or of the present. This is welcome. Every full-fledged poet desires to try his powers in narrative. Novels in verse are now a recognized form; though, of course, they go directly back to Chaucer. Yet it still remains for a poet of our time to give us any such *comédie humaine*. In fact, no matter how modern any trend may seem, it is usually involved with the rediscovery of something lost. Hart Crane and Stephen Spender, both moderns, rediscovered the work of a recluse Jesuit poet of a former century, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Seventeenth century John Donne, the Dean of Saint Paul's, has had a considerable influence upon American poetry in the twentieth century. But there is also this. Five years ago one of our most notable American poets, Horace Gregory, spoke of "that indigenous vitality that has always fed the veins of American poetry." It has triumphed finally, I think, over foreign influence, and gives today a noticeable flavor to the best American verse, which has assimilated what it needed from other literatures. After all, we are a polyglot nation. In that lies our greatest weakness and greatest strength in this challenging hour. But what we need above all, to face the hour, are order and precision, and these are exactly the qualities which poets have always endeavored to cultivate.

And, in very truth, our poets are continuing to write, and endeavoring to interpret a time of the most bewildering and cataclysmic change. It is they who will keep us in touch with fundamental wisdom and virtue and the values that do not alter. Listen to them now, and draw strength and sustenance from them, for their work is a rampart against barbarism and they hold no truck with the tyrants of the bloody hand! Even in this darkest of all days, beleaguered England must take heart from the words of one of her great poets of the stoic spirit:

The kings with half the earth at heel have marched from lands of morning,
There stallions drink the rivers up their spears benight the air,
And he who falls will die for naught and home there's no returning—
The Spartans on the sea-wet rock sat down and combed their hair.

War of Nerves

By Leonard Bacon

OUR role is middling
As one discerns.
America's fiddling
While Europe burns.

Times are contrarious,
There's no gainsaying.
It's no Stradivarius
That we are playing.

And the air we are mangling
Could be sweeter.
We are not untangling
A Bach partita.

Ah no! We are pounding
Politically
At themes ill-sounding
From Tin Pan Alley

What was achieved in
Times gone by
Is not believed in
By low or high

Who cherish a theory
That they can live
In an empty, dreary,
Negative,

And thoroughly boring
Continuum
By simply ignoring
What is to come.

We shall, we chuckle.
Get by perhaps,
If we only knuckle
To the Japs.

And no doubt we shall
Escape with a scare,

If we speak total—
Itarians fair

Who view us indeed
As simply a finer
"Hog of the breed
Of Poland-China."

The knaves will desert you
In the hour of the terror,
Who brag of your virtue,
Gloss over your error,

Flatter inanity,
Say you're too moral,
And have too much humanity
To take up a quarrel.

Where shall we find it,
The spirit sound,
With the truth behind it
No words confound,

That doesn't sit tight,
That is not smug,
Whose hearing and sight
Are not dulled by a drag?

We must have leading
Less suspected
Than place-hounds pleading
To be elected,

Know instincts urgent
As those that call
The salmon resurgent
Up the white fall,

And get a guiding
That will take us forth
Like the wild geese sliding
In the Spring sky North.

ANYA

by Joy Davidman

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ADULATION AND THE ARTIST

(*Continued from page 7*)

was simply frantic, and defiant to the death."

Then came recognition, when, as he puts it, "all the poets that were my friends and myself were suddenly *recognized* all at once, seemingly the same morning." From the first he was aware of the danger of success, of the necessity for that quietness to think which he was not granted.

> Especially since 1919, from South Texas to Saskatchewan—and Oxford, England to San Francisco, it has been a path of fire for me, gorgeous fire, a really beautiful blazing panorama of life, and the fire of the human faces was still burning in beauty before me when I came to Gulf Park and was *near dead* from a burnt imagination, more than a burnt out body, but still blazing. I *know* this is what people love in me, even those that think themselves intimate. But it is public, public, public. You are to me the incarnation of all things equally good and infinitely opposite. You are virgin modesty and quietness, and meditation and individual conversation and the village mood I have always worshipped and have always declared was the quiet pool in the heart of America. I *must in some sense* take you with me every step of the way henceforth. . . .
>
> And you are certainly my only hope to be loyal to my best self. All the next steps are impossible without you.
>
> Now, I realize, looking at "The Handy Guide for Beggars" this morning—that I am further from that book than I have ever been in my whole life, that my whole life must be worked from the other end. I am no longer the town fool whistling to keep up his courage and defy Babbitt and Main Street. Quite the contrary, I am almost wrecked by public good will. By September or October, when the reviews of the "Collected Poems" come roaring in, I will be more demoralized than ever. Above all I need a Handy Guide to Privacy, to serenity, to meditation, to delicacy of fancy, to village quietness, to secret prayer, to untouched girl beauty, and the innocence of your glorious young mind. My manager Armstrong is determined to national-tour me again, Bryanize me if possible. My two publishers back the idea, and I am sure of flattery and fried chicken in every town, while slowly disintegrating for lack of your care. . . . My particular United States has been delivered to me, and I have not the strength to receive it alone, the sense to understand it, the heart to love it, alone. . . .
>
> The privilege of the average life, the right of leading a normal, off-duty life at least part of the time was denied him, as it is denied to all artists. The public would not think of demanding that a preacher preach save at limited times, that a doctor or a clerk or a cotton picker spend twenty-four hours a day at work, but a writer is never permitted to relax. He always, no matter in what company or circumstances, remains not a human being, but a writer.
>
> The idea of the ideal, as well as that of quietness, permeates the letters. The young girl herself became his ideal; she must go with him, without her he could do nothing, and he apostrophizes her both as poetic vision, eternal truth and the solitude he so desired. There must be, he insists, not only quiet, but some vision of what must be attained there.
>
> "This is the way I felt before I met you. This is a song I wrote in my notebook when I was in England with my mother:—
>
> My heart is full of love-songs, though my loves have gone away,
> Have turned to other lovers, one and all.
> They are wooing in the palaces, or kissing in the hay;
> I pass their homes and hear the cupids call.
> My heart is full of love-songs, but who will hear them now?
> My lovers are the South wind
> Or the snow.
> I am thinking of the dears I knew
> Who sleep beneath the hills,
> Of the tears and cries and flowers
> Of long ago.
>
> All that desolation was in my heart—and had been in my heart for a long time—when I met you—and then my mother's death and the final breaking-up of the home also. When I met you my only home was the entire United States, and I was loving everybody in the whole United States, the whole one hundred and ten million, just to escape loneliness. I suppose that is one thing that made me seem so strange to you and to the girls that teased you so unmercifully about me. I was strange—for I had stretched

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Title and Author	*Crime, Place, and Sleuth*	*Summing Up*	*Verdict*
MURDER DRAWS A LINE *Willetta Ann Barber* and *R. F. Schabelitz* (Crime Club: $2.)	Fatal Manhattan studio-stabbing and two other deaths make much work for sketching-sleuth Storm and Shand of Homicide Squad.	Plot excellent, characters vivid, numerous illustrations enlightening—but superabundance of had-I-but-knowning annoys cranky judge.	Very good grade
VERDICT OF TWELVE *Raymond Postgate* (Crime Club: $2.)	Aunt accused of slaying youthful heir to British fortune. Story analyzes backgrounds and motives of suspect and jurors.	Refreshing twist to crime fiction, handled effectively and with grim realism, and with gasp-producing terminal snapper.	One of the best
THE CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED FISH *William Dubois* (Little, Brown: $2.)	Much-married millionaire news-reel photographer and remorseful scientist perish in Bahamas ere reporter-sleuth quells massacre.	Grisly bits in tropical aquaria on coral islet give special punch to yarn with variety of thrilling slants—including Nazi plot.	Swift and shuddery
MURDER ON THE PACIFIC *David Knox Patton* (Dodd, Mead: $2.)	Perceptive purser on trans-Pacific liner bluffs killer of consular trouble-hunter and dope carrier into confession.	Interesting assortment of characters, including an amazing missionary, rule-of-thumb sleuthing, and not unexpected wind-up.	Agreeable

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my lonely heart over this whole nation and loved them as citizens, as (to speak vainly and boastfully) no one ever loved just citizens before. So I seemed impersonal—and awkward and hard to get at. I know. My mother was the same way. You must reconcile yourself to that, my dear friend. Be *patient* with my inevitable awkwardness.

"All my life was piled up ahead of me—in magnificence, my dearest, darling lady, I feel like the army of Joan of Arc—with Joan unwilling to take command, but the army ready to fight in her name. And now for a new theme. Walt Whitman is a *great poet, and I am not.*

"So many critics—so many many critics have said to me, 'Be our Walt Whitman.' I suppose those that sincerely and steadily insist the most on my continuing to be a poet say this. They pour all America into my lap and beg me to sing about it. *I cannot.*

"And here is a secret. Well—I always considered Whitman as a man and a citizen a genius, but a rather crooked and shabby old man, with a streak of perversion. I can forgive this, but it keeps the American people from finding leadership in him. I had rather imitate St. Paul a thousand miles off, for St. Paul was a true traveler, a true democrat and a true saint. I think you are strong enough now to stand my thought about Whitman, and I want to give it to you plainly; it has so much to do with your future and mine, and it has so much to do with your willingness to be sung about, a willingness which I profoundly adore, and wish to carry to its uttermost conclusions in your imagination. Pardon me if my words are labored. There is a struggle in my mind.

"Whitman never saw the America I have seen and loved. The group of Brownsville neighbors who came in to hear me could total half a million or a million, if all my audiences were added up for these ten years. And they (my audiences) always evoke the same mood that was evoked in Brownsville, and *always* my audience *loves* me—as the Brownsville people did.

"Walt Whitman in his wildest dreams was only a pretended troubadour. He sat still in cafes. Never such a troubadour as Bryan or a thousand Chautauqua men. He was an infinitely more skillful writer than any other American. But I can beat him as a troubadour. Whitman will always fail as the law-giver for America because he had no Elizabeth. America hungers for a Virgin Queen to glory in, as she did in the days of Virginia when Virginia was named for Queen Elizabeth. America is like me waiting for something exquisitely beautiful and virginal to which to bow down to, and there was no Lady Queen in all of Whitman. His fat farm wives sprawled among the cabbages. The poorest sickliest, lowest family in the slums may produce one pretty child capable of being a movie queen more delicate than all the heroines of Whitman. You would suppose the nation had no wary beauty if you would listen to him, and he is a million miles from chivalry. America is passionately waiting for chivalry—for the chance to worship with true Sermon-on-the-Mount religion a worthy Virgin Queen. No singer can leave out the Queen and command America, though he is in a thousand other aspects most noble American. Whitman abdicated when he left her out.

"O, I who think these things every time Whitman is mentioned in my connection, have for the first time explained them. In the matter of Democracy the world has made tremendous progress with the help of such as Whitman, but in the matter of Democratic chivalry, I do not see how it is possible to go beyond the days of King Arthur. The best of the South thinks this, and that is the reason the South is my country."

He rereads the account of a walking trip in Florida and Georgia in 1906, long before he was successful, and the contrast between himself before and after his meteoric rise is so great, between the young, vibrant poet and the weary, frightened man, that he is forced to revalue himself.

"I have not read this book ('The Handy Guide for Beggars') for years and years, till now I reread it this day, annotating it for you. I cannot believe I wrote it. My background is so unutterably different. Now the eternal sound in my ears is of cheering audiences, the clatter of banquet tables, the eternal rattle of flat-wheeled Pullman cars, Rotary clubs in endless Rotation, and my own egotism as touchy as a belle about my charms.

"I have at last found out about myself that I am unutterably arrogant, that what in me is not silly pride is unutterably personal vanity, that there is not one inch of the democrat in my natural instincts, and that my appetite for pomp is as insatiable as that of some fat Roman Consul who has recaptured Egypt. . . .

"If I can write myself a proud enough poem, I may again become humble, having purified myself by writing out my arrogance."

But this talk of curing oneself through arrogance is but temporizing. The balance which self-unity gives, that self-unity only attained by thought and solitude and sorrow, he did not have. On the fly-leaf of a copy of Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" which he gave to the young girl in 1923, Vachel Lindsay wrote his epitaph, the epitaph of many American artists who were so unfortunate as to find early success.

"He who is generally sick, and then too well, he who is a changeling from the cradle, lives in houses too big or none at all, eats too much or too little, is a monastic, then a heretic, is cursed by too many, then blessed by too many, hates Latin and loves hieroglyphics, hates money and loves power, is a failure when anything is expected of him and succeeds only by exasperating and occasional, unflattering accident, always loves beauty and hates deformity, is famed for mere racket; yet he loves above all quietness, he loves the whole United States with desperate passion, yet he is lost and exhausted in it. He hates age and loves youth, hates haste and loves meditation. He therefore declares himself in earnest courtship of beauty, youth and a meditative mind."

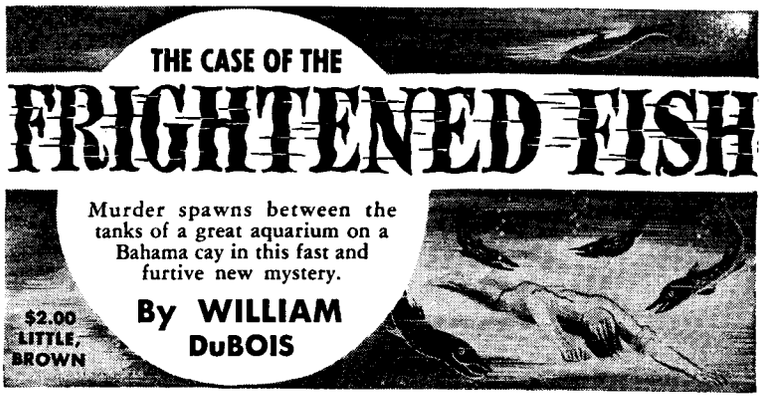
SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 332)

CHARLES READE

*THE COMING MAN**

I got no reply to my invitation to name the two public feats I alluded to. Yet there are men about town so overflowing with mental power, that the Weeklies have had to set up a waste-pipe for their intellects; it is called Acrostic.

* *(Letters to Harper's Weekly—1878)*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I Have Seen the Mountains

By Horace Gregory

EVERYTHING would have been better if I had not
seen the mountains,
not hills, but mountains with rocks as
big and naked as the side
of a reconditioned, bomb-proof dinosaur
that cannot come to life in a museum—
big as all that, and near the top
expensive people dressed like rodeo
boys leaping from expensive cars, shouting:
"This scenery is beautiful,
this air is air you can't buy anywhere
but here, the mountains are
so big, so old, so everlasting,
so high, so deep."

The trouble is: mountains get in the brain,
growing against the sky, closing out the sun
as though they were God's hand;
or moving slowly, slowly behind your back,
they suddenly are here where you are,
so big, so powerful nothing can stop them now,
not even death, and the long terrible pain
of waking up again with new arms like the branches of a tree,
or eyes like flowers, or hair like grass,
or body like a field of wheat, healthy and strong
in sunlight or in rain.

You might call it fate, the way I met the mountains,
the hope to get away from everywhere
into the sky as up a ladder in a dream,
head into heaven like a monument
of someone dead so many years
and is so famous that even children recognize his face
and mispronounce his name.

That was what I think I wanted, but could not get;
nobody wants mountains to follow him,
crowding him down into a corner of a room against the wall,
moving as the short hand of a clock moves
until there is nothing left of him at all.

That feeling is like going to a bank
where no one knows you and the teller says:
"How can I help it if I can't give you money,
or if you die?
I am not the bank, nor the bank's president,
nor the chairman of trustees; it's the bank that does it,
powerful and big as mountains,
and it's a secret where the money goes.
Maybe they hide it with European gold
down yonder in Kentucky or Tennessee,
and keep it there to make new wedding rings.
Do you want to kill me,
do you want to turn me out into the street
because a cheque might possibly be bad?"

Perhaps it is all my fault
to feel this way, perhaps I am to blame,
perhaps the world will change tomorrow,
and I will not get older every day.

Do you feel that darkness,
and that cold wind that seems to rise up from the ground
into the sky?
making the lights dim,
buildings and houses, dockyards and tenements fall away,
until each man in a city of eight million souls
feels small, knowing that power too big for any name.

Do I have to tell you?
Even now, the mountains come.

Variorum Chaucer

THE TEXT OF THE CANTERBURY TALES STUDIED ON THE BASIS OF ALL KNOWN MANUSCRIPTS. By John M. Manly and Edith Rickert. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1940. 8 *vols.* 4676 *pp.* $40.

Reviewed by ROBERT K. ROOT

WHEN the poet Chaucer died on October 25, 1400, he left behind him in the house that he had recently leased in the garden of Westminster Abbey a pile of papers —not, it would seem, in the best of order—which contained all that he had been able to write of his great masterpiece the "Canterbury Tales." His thirty pilgrims were to have told tales on the road to Canterbury and other tales on the return journey to the Tabard Inn at Southwark. A prologue and concluding epilogue and connecting links which should recount various episodes along the way were to have bound the tales together into a larger unity. He had been working at this masterpiece for at least thirteen years; but he was a busy man under obligation to give much of his time and energy to important administrative duties in the service of King Richard II. When death intervened, he had written a brilliant Prologue, twenty-four tales—two of them unfinished — and some only of the links which should have connected these tales. For certain of the tales, apparently, fair copies had been made; for others there was only his own working copy with many interlined revisions. He had not even made up his mind finally as to the order in which the tales should ultimately be arranged.

After his death, some literary executor did what he could to bring the poet's pile of papers into plausible arrangement, and employed scribes to produce ordered manuscripts which might be sold to a small reading public eager to own the final work of an author whose earlier poems they had read with keen delight. It would seem that more than one such early editor tried his hand at the task. These earliest manuscripts were copied and the copies again recopied with a steadily mounting accumulation of corrupt readings. The corruptions were sometimes mere blundering careless errors of a hurried scribe, sometimes, as in the case of the very beautifully written Ellesmere manuscript, the ingenious though quite unauthorized emendations of a careful but unscrupulous scribal editor.

It was not until 1478 that Caxton produced the first printed edition of the "Canterbury Tales"; but Caxton did no more than turn over to his typesetter the first manuscript copy that chanced to come to his hand, and subsequent printers, until the eighteenth century, were content to reprint the text of Caxton.

During the century following Chaucer's death the English language was

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undergoing such rapid and radical changes that scribes no longer understood his grammatical forms or were able to catch the intended music of his verse, with the result that his verses as the scribes wrote them down would not scan and his sense often degenerated into mere nonsense. No one of the surviving manuscripts, it must be remembered, ever passed under the poet's own correcting eye.

IT is the aim of the eight stout volumes now before us to undo all this accumulated work of scribal corruption and to recover, as completely as the evidence will permit, the authentic text of Chaucer's masterpiece as it originally stood in that pile of papers that he left behind him in his house at Westminster. Such a recovery of Chaucer's very words is possible only after a painstaking critical scrutiny of the surviving manuscripts. This work of recovery was begun by Tyrwhitt in 1775, continued in the nineteenth century by Furnivall, Skeat, and Pollard, and carried still further by Professor F. N. Robinson in his edition of Chaucer published in 1933. But these editors examined only a few of the manuscripts. It has remained for Professors Manly and Rickert to print a text based on a detailed examination of all the known manuscripts.

It was a task of appalling proportions. The "Canterbury Tales" contains some 25,000 lines of verse and prose, and the manuscripts and early printed copies to be examined number fifty-eight relatively complete and twenty-six fragmentary texts. Mr. Manly and Miss Rickert and their collaborators at the University of Chicago had first to compare line by line and word by word the readings of all these eighty-four documents. By means of a substantial grant from the University of Chicago, and after the securing of many special permissions, photostatic copies of all the manuscripts, scattered among many libraries of Europe and America, were assembled in the "Chaucer workshop" at Chicago, so that most of the work of collation could be done there.

Volume I is chiefly filled by highly detailed descriptions, of each of the manuscripts—the probable date of transcription, the various handwritings, illuminations and illustrations, peculiarities of dialect and spelling, mutilations, and indications furnished by scribblings on margins and blank pages of the history of the manuscript as it has passed from one owner to another through the five centuries of its existence. Volume II is concerned with a very intricate discussion of the classification of the manuscripts. When the textual critic has assembled all the variant readings, he ordinarily finds that in addition to the corrupt readings peculiar to an individual manuscript, there are other corruptions shared by a considerable group of manuscripts. This agreement in corruption indicates that the manuscripts of the group have all been copied, at one or more removes, from

From the Ellesmere MS

Chaucer

a manuscript, now lost, written at an earlier date than any one manuscript of the group. From the existing "descendants" it is possible to reconstruct the lost "parent" manuscript, and so to simplify appreciably the final task of reconstructing Chaucer's text. Volumes III and IV contain the results towards which the whole study has been directed—the authentic text of the "Canterbury Tales" purged of all the errors of all the erring scribes. At the foot of each page are entered the most important variant readings, and at the end of each volume are found critical notes which discuss the doubtful lines and justify the readings which the editors have adopted. The remaining four volumes contain the "Corpus of Variants." Every variant reading found even in a single manuscript is faithfully recorded, on the off chance that some future investigator may find in it some possible significance.

It will be obvious from the survey of the work just given that it is addressed to a small group of Chaucerian specialists; even they will not find it easy to master and appraise. For them, however, it is a scholarly achievement of very great importance.

Just when Chaucer was born no one knows with precise certainty, but the generally accepted date is 1340, and the present year, 1940, has been celebrated as a six-hundred-year anniversary. That makes it very appropriate that this monumental study of the text of the "Canterbury Tales" should bear this date. The work is a fitting monument to Chaucer; but it is also, most unhappily, a memorial to both its learned authors. Miss Rickert, who had bravely refused to accept the verdict of invalidism pronounced by her doctors, died in May, 1938. She had continued her work on the task until a few days before her death. Mr. Manly lived to complete their work, but died at the age of seventy-five on April 2, 1940, just three months after its publication.

This year of 1940 marks also the completion of the first fifty years of the University of Chicago Press. The Press is to be congratulated on its share in the undertaking. The volumes have not been set up and printed from ordinary type, but have been printed from reduced photographic plates of very carefully typewritten pages. For a work such as this, where the sale cannot exceed a few hundred copies, this process reduces radically the cost of production. But the economy has not been at the expense of beauty or legibility. The volumes are as easy to read as any book ordinarily printed, and their design is worthy of the traditions of a great university press and of the great scholarly achievement which is their substance.

Robert K. Root, dean of the faculty, Princeton University, is a noted Chaucerian scholar.

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TRADE WINDS

P. E. G. QUERCUS

BEATRICE WARDE, an American living in England, has had privately printed a fine little plea *The Same Book*. It reminds American readers that in addition to buying our native crop they can come extraordinarily close to friends in trial overseas by occasionally buying English books too—"the same books being read at this moment by boys in hospitals, families waiting in shelters, sailors in the night—watches and poor sleepless old dons in the echoing universities. Also you'll be helping English and Scottish printers in the toughest time they ever had to face—and in the demi-millennial year of the craft you need to thank printers." ☞This is the season when the attentive book-browser finds his best bargains. Looking back over our own adventures in that field, nothing in the past six months gave us more pleasure than finding a copy of Art Young's book on *Thomas Rowlandson*, for 49 cents. (That was at the Gotham Book Mart.) ☞Another fine satisfaction, though considerably more costly, was finding at C. P. Everitt's bookshop an old colored print of the once famous Atlantic liner *City of New York* in which we had a special sentimental interest.

★ ★

☞To buy more books than one can possibly read at present seems the best preparation for old age. ☞Arthur H. Clark Company of Glendale, Calif., catalogue a complete set of the London *Saturday Review*, volumes bound throughout from 1855 to 1901 (91 vols.) for $195; certainly a valuable purchase for a library or what used to be called a gentleman's estate. ☞In a Long Island village lately we bought for $5 bound volumes of *Graham's Magazine* for 1846 and 1847, including lots of grand costume plates (in color), the first publication of Poe's *Philosophy of Composition*, and plenty of that mysterious poet T. H. Chivers. We note that Chivers occasionally added to his signature the initials M. D., which was news to us. ☞Nowadays we meet the name Chivers mostly on marmalade jars; though no marmalade in the world is up to Cooper's Oxford. ☞Or what would you think (still in Arthur H. Clark's catalogue) of *Harper's Magazine* 1850-1901, 103 volumes bound, for $75? A young couple given such a present would be equipped for a lifetime of rainy days, and would have no time or space for the woes of current literature.

★ ★

☞It took a letter all the way from Manila (from T. Kevin Mallen) to put us straight on Erskine Childers. He was not executed by the British, says our correspondent, but by the Irish Free State army, in Beggar's Bush Barracks in Dublin. "He really was the only Englishman who figured in the troubles both against the Black and Tans and in the later Civil War. The British, God help them now, did plenty of mischief in Ireland but let us not lay the death of one of their outstanding men at their door. The Irish did it, we felt he had it coming to him. God rest his soul." ☞The memory of Erskine Childers was refreshed lately by mention of his remarkable novel *The Riddle of the Sands* which we have been hoping someone would republish.

★ ★

☞We are pleased to hear that our old friend Hudson Strode, professor at the University of Alabama, has successfully encouraged still another of his students into a publishing contract. Edward Kimbrough, graduate student in Prof. Strode's course on Creative Writing, has signed with Lippincott for his novel *From Hell to Breakfast*, a satire on political life in Mississippi. ☞Four novels written in Mr. Strode's classes in the past two years have been accepted by leading publishers.

★ ★

☞There's good vacation reading for watermen in that excellent little quarterly *The Sea Chest*, a digest of seagoing lore and fiction published at Box 82, Station F, N. Y. City. 50c per copy or $2 per year, and any nautical-minded booksellers should take it in. ☞Henry Miller writes us in enthusiasm about a work-in-progress by Kenneth Patchen, *Albion Moonlight*. "It's being written," says H. M., "in a dummy of an unpublished de luxe edition of *Two Years Before the Mast*."

★ ★

☞Publishers' dummies have always been a strong incentive to penmanship; Old Q.'s only attempt to keep an autograph album was in the dummy of a projected edition of Frances Hodgson Burnett. ☞The weekly paper issued by Minnesota State Prison (Stillwater, Minn.) prints a personal note which we refer to the Management of *The S.R.L.*—It says that A477 "will exchange *Red Book, Blue Book, American, Saturday Evening Post*, and *Liberty*, for *The Saturday Review of Literature*." ☞Mrs. Glenn Morrow (Colorado) asks if our taste in Travel Literature includes match folders? It does indeed, and we are delighted by one she sends. It advertises the Fox Café & Liquor Store, Lamar, Col., which lists as its specialties *Corn-Fed Steaks, Dirty Coffee, Poor Service*. ☞Her own collection, Mrs. Morrow says, takes up no space except in memory. She collects church spires.

Morality and Verse

THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE NEW POETRY. By Amos N. Wilder. New York: Harper & Bros. 1940. 262 pp., with index. $2.50.

Reviewed by DUDLEY FITTS

THIS is a thoughtful and painstaking investigation of the moral quality of the new verse. Other critics—notably Tate, MacLeish, Ransom, Caudwell, and Hicks—have treated the subject, but their concern with it has been primarily esthetic or political or sociological, and they have touched only incidentally that aspect of it which chiefly interests Mr. Wilder. As a theologian, he proposes to relate poetry to a working Christian ethic; and as a man acutely aware of the temper of his time, he realizes that the poets he must discuss are not the traditionalists, but those "poets without laurels," in Ransom's phrase, who are the analysts of modern civilization. He is inclined by temperament and training to favor the traditionalists; and not a little of his book's force arises from the conflict between this predisposition and an honest, sober endeavor to understand attitudes and techniques that must often be repugnant to him. "I did not know until I read it," he says, "that it was concerned with matters important to me that were largely untouched in traditional poetry. I found that some of my own autobiography was recorded in these poets, and that I knew myself and my age better for having read them. . . ." It is easy enough to smile at the naiveté of this assertion; but the Eastmans, the Hillyers, and the Tristram Coffins remind us that, naive or not, it is by no means always easy to be coherent, let alone temperate, in criticizing these poets. The novelty of the material leads Mr. Wilder into various strange positions, but never once into a cheap one.

By the "new" poets we are to understand those writers—"experimentalists," "revolutionists," what you will—whose work has mirrored, in a variety of forms old and new, the shattering spiritual and social upheavals of the last fifteen years. Mr. Wilder's task is not only to describe their methods, but also to arrive at an understanding of the ethical attitudes that inform the methods. This he accomplishes with uneven success. For one thing, he is not yet at ease in these regions: he is still, as they say, shockable. More seriously, he is not particularly interested in poetry as poetry. His taste is unsettled; and since his preoccupation is rather with ideas than with technique, he often mistakes a bad imitation for the real thing, an ineptitude for a finished poem. Thus he exaggerates the importance of a writer like Patchen, for instance, who is treated with as much deference as Auden or Crane. Poems that are definitely the *opera minora*—not to say Juvenilia—of authentic poets (MacLeish's "The Tea Party"

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is an example) acquire a disproportionate significance. Yet it is precisely because of his bias that he is able to treat adequately (and, so far as I know, for the first time) the fine "Hamlet of A. MacLeish," and to make some exceedingly penetrating observations on the religious poetry of T. S. Eliot. One must be grateful to Mr. Wilder for the breadth of sympathy which includes so many of the youngest poets, but his neglect of Horace Gregory seems thereby the more unaccountable; and it is strange that two of the most philosophical voices in the younger group—James Agee and Richard Eberhart, men whose work is almost written to order for the purposes of his investigation—are not mentioned at all.

The final thesis of the book is, roughly, that if poetry and religion are to have any continuing positive significance in the modern world, they must achieve it by joining in that Protestantism which is our Anglo-Saxon heritage, the "essential Puritan and Christian discovery of autonomous and responsible personality. Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism, Mr. Wilder thinks, is an idiosyncratic solution, a passing beyond the tradition; as such, it offers no general hope. It is the tradition itself, that must be recovered and revitalized. Be that as it may, here is an honest, fair-minded, plain-speaking evaluation of modern verse.

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			1-Z	2-N	3-G		4-A	5-G	6-E		7-W	8-D	9-C	10-M	11-P	12-V
13-H	14-N	15-E		16-W	17-C	18-X	19-I	20-U	21-V	22-A	23-K	24-N		25-G	26-S	
27-X	28-B	29-R	30-C	31-K	32-P	33-Z		34-D	35-P	36-Y		37-O	38-G		39-X	40-W
41-U	42-O	43-R	44-D	45-M	46-I	47-C	48-K	49-H	50-A	51-J		52-W	53-V	54-G	55-A	
56-Q	57-F	58-L		59-V	60-G	61-T	62-Y	63-J	64-X	65-W	66-A	67-L	68-N		69-K	70-O
71-P	72-D	73-V	74-N	75-C	76-J	77-M	78-X	79-A		80-B	81-S		82-E	83-F	84-L	
85-U	86-K	87-B	88-C	89-N	90-J	91-S		92-H	93-B	94-F		95-F	96-Z	97-L	98-O	
99-T	100-X	101-A	102-V		103-R	104-S		105-A	106-Q	107-O		108-F	109-Y	110-E		111-T
112-Y	113-B		114-T	115-Q	116-Y	117-Z		118-J	119-T	120-L	121-O	122-U		123-P	124-L	
125-M	126-O	127-C	128-M		129-S	130-F	131-P		132-M	133-N	134-V	135-K	136-U	137-X	138-I	139-T
140-D	141-E		142-S	143-X	144-Y		145-M	146-L	147-O	148-B		149-G	150-S		151-B	152-F
	153-N	154-D	155-I	156-O	157-H	158-V	159-C		160-S	161-Q		162-H	163-K	164-E	165-J	166-Q
167-R		168-S	169-G	170-P		171-W	172-C	173-R	174-A	175-J		176-U	177-M	178-I	179-Z	180-S

DIRECTIONS

To solve this puzzle you must guess twenty-six words, the definitions of which are given in the column headed DEFINITIONS. The letters in each word to be guessed are numbered. These numbers appear under the dashes in the column headed WORDS. There is a dash for each letter in the required word. The key letters in the squares are for convenience, indicating to which word in the definitions each letter in the diagram belongs. When you have guessed a word, fill it in on the dashes; then write each letter in the correspondingly numbered square on the puzzle diagram. When the squares are all filled in you will find (by reading from left to right) a quotation from a famous author. Reading up and down the letters mean nothing. The black squares indicate ends of words; therefore words do not necessarily end at the right side of the diagram.

When the column headed WORDS is filled in, the initial letters spell the name of the author and the title of the piece from which the quotation has been taken. Authority for spelling and definitions is Webster's New International Dictionary (1938 edition).

The solution of last week's *Double Crostic* will be found on page 19 of this issue.

DEFINITIONS

A. Random (comp.)

B. Unorganized.

C. Famous Ode by Coleridge.

D. Country in Asia.

E. Squalled.

F. Interjection: Bravo! (Persian).

G. Son of Laomedon.

H. "The Black Republic."

I. *Omit from consideration.*

J. Pertaining to a certain country adjoining China.

K. Buoyant cheer.

L. Ancient capital of Assyria.

M. Repudiated.

N. Disappear gradually.

O. Fellow countrymen.

P. Traditional founder of Athens.

Q. English novelist and journalist (1831-94).

R. Gold or silver lace, 18th century.

S. Even chance (comp.) (slang).

T. Rumpus.

U. Envelop as with a garment.

V. Harsh-sounding.

W. Rumpus (colloq.) (comp.)

X. Timely juncture.

Y. French actress (1857-1920) (stage name).

Z. Land of which Zan'a is capital.

WORDS

55 22 4 50 101 105 66 174 79

93 28 80 113 148 151 87

159 17 9 30 47 75 88 172 127

44 154 34 8 72 140

82 15 164 141 6 110

152 57 108 95 83 94 130

54 149 169 5 25 38 60 3

92 162 49 157 13

155 19 46 138 178

175 76 118 63 90 165 51

23 163 69 48 135 86 31

84 120 124 58 67 97 146

45 132 125 77 145 177 10 128

89 14 74 133 68 24 153 2

98 156 42 37 147 107 126 121 70

11 131 32 35 123 71 170

166 106 56 115 161

103 43 173 29 167

81 160 26 129 180 104 168 142 150 91

111 139 99 114 119 61

20 41 136 176 85 122

59 21 73 53 134 158 102 12

65 7 171 16 40 52

100 39 64 18 27 137 143 78

144 36 62 112 109 116

1 96 179 33 117

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